



Indiana State Department of Agriculture

Governor Eric Holcomb

Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch, Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development

January 9, 2023

Representative Jim Baird  
1314 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative Baird,

As Secretary of Agriculture for the state of Indiana, please consider and accept the following correspondence on behalf of Hoosier farmers and producers as you continue to deliberate the 2023 Farm Bill.

Indiana is the 10th-largest farming state in the nation, and we have more than 56,000 family farms. Our Hoosier farmers rely on key pieces of the Farm Bill to manage risk, adopt conservation practices, and market their crops and livestock. Therefore, it is imperative that Congress deliver a forward-looking, fully funded Farm Bill, on time.

Outlined below are a few initiatives and opportunities Hoosier farmers believe are imperative for the 2023 Farm Bill.

#### **Conservation Funding**

- Indiana farmers pride themselves on being good stewards of the land and rely on programs and technical assistance from the USDA, Indiana State Department of Agriculture, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts to implement conservation practices. Continued funding for technical assistance is essential to ensure that Indiana remains a leader in conservation initiatives. Increasing program flexibility will remove barriers for new farmers and landowners to participate in conservation programs as well as help to retain early adopters.

#### **Prioritize Animal Disease Management and Prevention**

- Indiana was one of the first states to face the latest surge of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza. While we are fortunate to have a proactive and highly engaged Board of Animal Health, the reality is that our livestock industry is just one disease away from irreparable harm. It is imperative that this Farm Bill prioritize early disease detection and surveillance, prevention and rapid response and ensure the National Animal Vaccine and Veterinary Countermeasures Bank has adequate funding to support the livestock industry.

#### **Promote Trade**

- Indiana is the eighth-largest agricultural exporting state in the U.S., shipping an estimated \$4.6 billion annually in domestic agricultural exports abroad. The Market Access Program promotes American agricultural products, and I support increased funding so we can continue to share our valuable crops and commodities worldwide.



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### **Connect Rural Communities**

- COVID-19 underscored the need to connect and strengthen rural communities. Considering the recent increase in federal funding, I urge you to be mindful of the state's role in allocating funding. In Indiana, we have successfully run the Next Level Connections broadband grant program for three years and are continuing to support rural areas with increased connectivity. Individual states are very effective in managing broadband grant programs therefore more money should flow through the states rather than federal programs.

### **Support Ag Research**

- Agricultural research is vital to ensuring American agriculture remains safe, efficient and competitive. I support increased funding for agricultural research and extension programs, including funding for our outstanding agricultural colleges and universities. This is an important area, and we must not fall behind.

### **Specialty Crop Block Grant Program**

- The Specialty Crop Block Grant program has been effective in enhancing specialty crops throughout the state and nation, but the program needs increased funding and a process for designating new crops such as hemp for horticultural uses. I also encourage Congress to consider allowing USDA to direct funds to be used for technical assistance for the grant application process, and that the grant parameters be expanded to address the current and future needs of the industry.

The Farm Bill provides farmers with a reliable safety net and guarantees our consumers access to the safest and most affordable food supply. I thank you for your time and attention to this most pressing matter and encourage you to speak with farmers from across the state as you continue your deliberations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Suzanne Crouch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lt. Gov. Suzanne Crouch